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Taiwan International Relations

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ABSTRACT

Taiwan is home to more than twenty three million people. It is one of “The Four Little Dragons” having risen drastically to become a technological hub. Taiwan is an island that is located off the southern coast of China, and it has been independently governed since the year 1949. However, its neighbor’s, and especially the mainland China view the island as a province despite Taiwan being a territory that has its government that has been elected democratically (Kastner, 2009). There are several leading political voices in the country that have differing views on the status of the island and its relationship with the mainland China. Some of the Taiwanese leaders observe the principle which advocated for only “one China” that comprises of the mainland China and the island. Other leaders advocate and push for a de jure autonomous Taiwan. This research will look to explore the political and economic relationships between Taiwan and its neighbors and especially China.

Keywords: *The Four Little Asian Dragons, Drastically, Independently, Advocated.*

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Both Taipei (capital city of Taiwan) and Beijing (capital city of mainland China) disagree on the status of the island. The People Republic of China maintains it recognizes only one China and they view Taiwan as an inalienable part of it. The PRC says that the island is bound together by an agreement that was reached in the year 1992 between Chinese Communist Party (CCP) representatives and those of Kuomintang (KMT) a political party that was ruling Taiwan at the time. The understanding known as the 1992 Consensus maintains that there is only one China although it can be interpreted differently. The tactical agreement that underlined the 1992 Consensus was that Taiwan would not seek independence. KMT accepted the agreement as just a starting point for any future negotiation (Alexander, 2014). However, in the recent years, the president of the island, Tsai Ing-wen, who is the leader of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party has never accepted reference to the 1992 consensus any time she is speaking about the relations between the two. The island’s president has always emphasized that she would seek to build trust between the island and the mainland through various communication channels to ensure the stability when it comes to the cross-strait relations. There are other leading voices within the ruling party who have rejected the existences of the 1992 consensus, and this leaves open the option to have a future independent Taiwan.

The KMT was in charge of the island from 1949 to 1987 whereby they governed under martial law. They repressed the political dissent and those Taiwanese people who had inhabited the island before the year 1945 faced a lot of discrimination. The island held its first legislative election in the year 1992 and afterward held a presidential election in the year 1996 (Kastner, 2009). The coalition partners together with the KMT have been historically viewing Taiwan as a part of the “one China” and they therefore never supported the independence of the island. However, the KMT after the year 2000 at various points found itself opposing those parties representing the inhabitants who had settled in Taiwan before 1949 and also their descendants. Despite being riven in its factionalism, the party has closer ties to the business leaders in the island and KMT consistently calls for ties with Beijing (Keng, & Schubert, 2010).

The politics of the country determines its relationship with its neighbors. DPP, the chief rival of the KMT was founded in the year 1986 whereby it became legal after three years when the ban was dropped on opposition parties. DPP has been calling for an independent Taiwan as a separate political identity from the mainland China. DPP since its invention has become an outlet whereby Taiwanese identity is expressed. The first known-KMT politician that served as the island president was Chen Shui-bian (2000-08) whereby he pushed for Taiwanese sovereignty (Kastner, 2009).

The mainland China keeps a close eye on the elections of the island. It has long favored a steady deepening of ties with the island, and this forges economic linkages which could, in the end, become too costly for Taiwan to sever which would nudge the two closer to unification (Alexander, 2014).

However, the PRC had a leadership transition in the year 2012, and the new president Xi Jinping embraced a tougher and a nationalistic stance towards all the regions that the mainland China claimed including Xinjiang, Tibet, Hong Kong and Taiwan alike.

The election of Tsai by the Taiwanese people has however brought closer scrutiny of the ties between mainland China and the island with Xi showing a lot of willingness to use all resources available to limit the capability of Tsai to reset the relations between the mainland and the island.

The mainland has been deploying missiles along the Taiwan Strait, and it has continued to modernize its capabilities regarding the military. Despite the mainland continuation to seek progress with the island through discussing economic issues and the exchanges of high-level people, it has refused to stop using force in resolving its disagreement with the island over its status (Kissinger, & Hormann, 2011).

2. METHODOLOGY

Various articles pertaining the relationship between Taiwan and its neighboring states were obtained. This study involved reviewing various articles by going through their abstracts to obtain insight on what they were all about. The political stand of the island determines its relationship with its neighbors including the economic relationship. The findings of the relationship between and its neighbors and especially mainland China were reviewed and analyzed below.

3. ANALYSIS

The political stand between the island and the mainland determines the overall relationship between the two. The continued use of force by mainland China has prompted the island to continue purchasing weapons and primarily from the United States. Taiwan, despite being a small island ranked as the ninth largest recipient of military weapons and firearms globally between 1979 and 2014 with the main supplier being the United States of America (Alexander, 2014). Taiwan political stands mean that over the coming years, the country will continue widening in China's favor. The strategic security of Taiwan rests heavily on the guarantees which were proposed by the US under the Taiwan Relations Act. However, in the recent years, many security analysts have raised their concerns over the imbalance in the military between Taipei and Beijing. Taiwan has not been spending a lot in the recent years in its military.

When it comes to its economic rapprochement, Taiwan has been long investing in China, and the investments began in the 1970s when the PRC leader implemented the reform policies. Despite the political stands between the two, their economic relationship has blossomed over the years. In 2014, the bilateral trade between Taiwan and China reached about two hundred billion dollars up from the eight billion dollars in 1991 (Rosen, & Wang, 2010). China has been the largest trading partner of Taiwan despite their different political stands over the state of the island.

However, the backlash against KMT the ruling party in the 2016 elections raises various questions about the societal views on the relations between Taiwan and China (Stolper, 2017). Several generations of democratic practices appear to have bound together the Taiwanese polity and people (Kastner, 2009). Despite most of the island inhabitants speaking Mandarin as their first language, there has been more than a century of separation between the mainland and the island which has led to many Taiwanese people to feel that they deserve that right of a continued separation with the mainland. More than 60% of the residents in the island regard themselves exclusively as Taiwanese. Only 33% identify themselves as both Chinese and Taiwanese.

The youth's political awakening in Taiwan was driven by both political ideals and practical frustrations. They experienced frustrations due to economic inequality and financial insecurity and also dissatisfaction in the Taiwan political factions. Such coupled with the fact that China continues to insist on the "one China" principle has been the biggest hindrance when it comes to the efforts of ensuring a peaceful development of the cross-strait ties between the mainland and the island (Alexander, 2014). With the recent election of the Taiwanese pro-independence leaders, there is a likelihood that China may shift its top security concerns from the current territorial and boundary disputes in the South and East China seas to defending the country's integrity across Taiwan. After the election of Tsai, the Chinese president was quick to state that China would resolutely contain a separatist path as far as the independence of Taiwan was concerned. This was largely prompted by the fact that Tsai was a known advocate of Taiwan independence and her political party refused to recognize the 1992 Consensus that pushed for the "one China" principle.

4. CONCLUSION

The politics in Taiwan determines its relationships with its neighbors and especially mainland China. Although the Taiwan main political parties concentrate on how to best manage the relationship between the island and the mainland China, both of them should take responsibility if they wish to avoid any crisis. A peaceful across the strait relationship is a key to the prosperity and the stability of the Pacific Rim.

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